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Pumailanlang

*"Diwata and Oble, Me and You"*

To the Commencement speaker President Alfredo E. Pascual, chair of the Board of Regents Honorable Patricia B. Licuanan, members of the Board of Regents, Chancellor Michael Lim Tan, university administration officials, officials of constituent universities, deans and directors, faculty, fellow graduates, parents, and friends, good morning.

Last March 23, the Philippines's first microsatellite named "Diwata" was launched to space. According to a UP Web site article, Diwata was "assembled by nine scientists," eight of whom are UP graduates. As Diwata currently flies in space, it also carries with it UP pride. It allows the UP spirit to soar up in the sky.

Apart from this marvelous object in space, here on the ground, there is another symbolic reminder of how it is to soar. The oblation statue of UP stands with its head looking above. Because the statue is elevated, it's already closer to the blissful heavens. With its arms outstretched and its palms up, it looks like some mighty force is propelling it upwards.

But how is Oble elevated compared to us looking up at it from the ground? It stands on a compact heap of rocks. These rocks are shaped differently, but their different shapes allow them to interlock with each other building a strong foundation from which Oble can soar.

Oble can represent each Iska and Isko and each person. The rocks are like the differently-shaped disciplines that make up UP. Each discipline, whether it be from the

sciences or humanities, has a different character. The combination of these differences allows humans to soar.

BA Philosophy is my second undergraduate degree. My first one is BS Basic Medical Sciences from UP Manila. In between, I took creative writing jobs. I feel bad when people think they can judge a whole discipline after taking a few units of the subject.

Unfortunately, this debate regarding which subjects are superior can actually affect lives. My first degree is the undergraduate component of UP Manila's INTARMED program, a seven-year accelerated MD program. By our third year of college, we automatically enter the first year of med school. Back then, I already knew I loved philosophy, but I also thought about the lower pay that philosophers got compared to medical doctors and maybe more importantly, the lower respect that philosophers received. My failure was I wasn't brave enough to accept and fully defend what I loved.

All around me, my classmates were flourishing in being shaped by the country's best medical institution. But for me, to support Oble, I wanted my rock to have a shape different from medicine. Unlike me, my classmates were starting to ascend to Diwata's altitude for their future.

One of my female classmates and I would come up with different ways to tell our parents that we would quit med. One approach was to tell awful news first to make the next news seem lighter. For instance, my friend would say, "Ma, I'm pregnant. On a lighter note, I quit med." As for me, because back then, I still wasn't out to my family, I'd say, "Ma, I'm gay. On a lighter note, I quit med."

I spent three and a half years in med proper before quitting. After I quit, I've been very lucky that my family, relatives, and friends have ultimately supported me from one career change to the next and from one failed life project after another. They are the wind

beneath my wings—wind strong enough to make me feel like fluttering as high as Diwata’s orbit.

It saddens me when I hear stories of students who don’t have the same support system that I have. I hope the youth can be encouraged to take whatever they want to study. When I quit med, I finally accepted what I was and was not willing to do with my life. I have one life to live, and I am going to try to flourish and soar no matter what anyone says.

My first day in Diliman was like a new life for me. I was excited to go to class. I wanted more and more philosophy. Accepting what I loved and daring to be different finally inspired me to be the best that I could be.

When we are inspired, we do our best work. When we do our best work, we can offer the best service to our countrymen, which is after all, what Oble is known to symbolize. It is in the interest of society that we put each other in situations that will inspire us to do our best work for the people. When scientists, artists, and philosophers do their best, it is not only the individual but also society that soars.

We need all of them. In a tragedy where 49 people were shot dead, it’s medical science that heals the victims’ bodies and minds, it’s art that inspires survivors to move forward, and it’s philosophy that forms ethics to prevent another moral disaster.

I have acquired scientific precision from medicine, artistic expression from creative writing, and rational open-mindedness from philosophy. All these have shaped the rock that I give in support of Oble’s soaring. Fellow graduates, we all have our shapes that are distinct and beautiful—beautiful like a *diwata*.

*Ako ay isang diwata. Lahat tayo ay diwata.* We, the graduates, have the potential to soar through the stratosphere. From the rocks of Oble on the ground to the cosmic domain of Diwata, our family, friends, university officials, and professors have shaped us to take

flight. Let us thank them by soaring to the sky. *Pumailanlang na tayo. Mabuhay ang mga bagong diwata!* Thank you.